

Into The Mystic

by Katvictory

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Summary: Mulder is caught in a misty netherworld between Heaven and Earth. A vengeful killer is stalking him. Is the only way out through the light?

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AUTHOR: Katvictory@uswest.net

DISCLAIMER: Fox Mulder, Dana Scully, etc., do not belong to anyone but Chris Carter. Uncle Angus, Karl Nix and Amanda are mine and he can use them if he want..Ask nicely though. I'm not doing this for money. That should all go to Mister Carter. And I ask that he please not sue me...Also Same goes to Van Morrison...It's his song and title.

RATING: Give it an PG-13...bad language

THANK YOUS: All my thanks go to Dave for listening to this wacky dream and helping me, like he always has, to make a dream a reality.

SUMMARY: Mulder is caught in a misty netherworld between Heaven and Earth. A vengeful killer is stalking him. Is the only way out through the light?

INTO THE MYSTIC

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We were born before the wind

Also younger than the sun

Ere the bonnie boat was won as we sailed into the mystic

Hark, now hear the sailors cry
Smell the sea and feel the sky
Let your soul and spirit fly into the mystic
And when that fog horn blows I will be coming home
And when that fog horn blows I want to hear it
I don't have to fear it
I want to rock your gypsy soul
Just like way back in the days of old
Then magnificently we will float into the mystic
And when that fog horn blows you know I will be coming home
And when that fog horn whistle blows I got to hear it
I don't have to fear it
I want to rock your gypsy soul
Just like way back in the days of old
And together we will float into the mystic
Come on girl...

Chapter 1-

"A Fox on a Rock"

The night was dark. The moon could not be seen through the thick fog. Fox Mulder sat on a rock, a puzzled frown on his face.

* How did I get here? *

He held his hand up and could hardly make out the pale form barely a foot in front of his face. The damp mist made him shiver, so he drew his coat closer about him.

* There's water here...I'm sitting on a rock surrounded by water. Just like when Scully and I went after Big Blue. *

He jumped at hearing a splash behind him. His breath caught in his throat 'til he heard an easily recognizable sound.

* Now that's a duck. *

And sure enough, a mallard paddled past his perch, quacking along as it swam.

* What the hell is going on? *

Mulder jumped again upon hearing something splashing through the water. He reached into his jacket for his gun. It wasn't there. His

mind flashed back to the time he'd been caught in similar circumstances, listening closely to the sound. Could it be that someone was moving through the water toward him, like when he and Scully had been stuck out on that lake in Georgia? If that was the case, all he had to do was walk toward the sound and he could wade to land. Careful of his balance, he made to leave the rock, calling out to whoever was wading by the bank.

"Hey, whoever is there, I'll wade out to you."

No answer; but he could still hear them trudging through the water. He pushed away from his rock to intercept them, and sank like a stone into the deep lake. Sputtering and gasping for air, Mulder cursed his stupidity. He tried in vain to climb back on his rock, going under each time. Strangely, the outcrop was now slick with algae. His lungs filled with water and he fought the panic; he forced himself to relax, roll onto his back and tread water.

"That's it Mulder, relax..."

"Scully," he called, surprised to hear his partners voice floating through the mist.

*I'm hearing things, she's not here. *

It was odd, but that was a fact of which he was certain. He listened to the night, floating in the cold murky water. The splashing sound was still there.

"Is somebody there?!" he called out, hoping it was somebody, not something, moving through the water. An alligator? A sea serpent?
"Yo, anybody there?"

"I'm rowing out to you," came a muffled reply.

Mulder breathed a sigh of relief and stared expectantly into the darkness in the direction the voice had come from. Soon he could see the fog shrouded form of a man in a small row boat, slowly moving toward him. His rescuer waved and eased the craft up to him.

"Thank God," Mulder breathed in relief, grabbing the hands that reached out to help him. "You're a life saver...literally," he said, through chattering teeth, as he settled down behind the man.

Mulder could barely make out the man's face, but saw that he was smiling, so he held out his hand in thanks.

"Thanks for the help. I don't know how long I could have held on. That water is cold."

The man's back was to him and he rowed in silence.

Mulder let a moment pass, then attempted to strike up a conversation once more. He had a burning question he needed answered.

"Ah...Could you please tell me where we are?"

The rowing stopped and the man stood up to face Mulder. He was vaguely familiar. Mulder tried to place the face.

"Ahh..do I know you?" the agent asked, and received a nod. "Where are we?"

The man moved quickly, swinging the oar into Mulder's chest like a baseball bat. "In HELL," was the growling response.

Mulder tumbled backward to the wood floor of the boat, all breath leaving his lungs. Fire painfully crushed his chest.

"DEFIB," he heard float through the fog.

He rolled to his side, straining to breathe, to recover from the vicious blow to his solar plexus. Fox heard and felt his assailant's boots on the wooden floor of the boat as he walked slowly toward him.

"WHA..?" Mulder pushed up on an elbow, doubting his senses. How could anyone be walking across the floor of a small row boat? He shook his head in disbelief as he took in his surroundings. He was lying on the deck of a sailboat, a deck that stretched a full forty feet. "What's going on?" he asked in panic, not believing his eyes.

His rescuer turned tormentor, smiled down at him, then quickly grabbed a rope to loop around the downed agent's neck. Mulder fought the noose, which threatened to seal off his air, with numbed fingers.

"Breathe..., Damn It...Breathe, Mulder..."

Mulder looked for Scully frantically as he tried to loosen the man's grip on the rope. Suddenly, he was released and he fell bonelessly to the deck, gasping for air, dizzy and weak.

"No, not yet," his tormentor muttered. He grabbed Mulder by his lapels, forcing the agent to look at him. "Do you know me, Mulder? Do you know who I am?"

Mulder shook his head, then studied the face before him.

"Nix?" Mulder choked in amazement.

Karl Nix dropped him to the deck and laughed, happy that his victim recognized him.

"You're good," he spat, towering over Mulder.

The air he sucked into his lungs burned, but it was a blessed relief after the near strangulation. Mulder took Nix's 'gloating time' as a respite to gather his wits about himself.

* What is happening here? Where is here? What's going on? Where's Scully? Am I dreaming? Am I crazy? How is Nix here...I must be dreaming because Nix is...*

"Are we dead?" Mulder asked, stunned.

Nix laughed and kicked at Mulder. It was a half-hearted kick that the agent easily rolled away from.

"You wish," Nix replied bitterly and kicked at the downed man again.

"But...the last I heard you were still at Valley View. Still...."

"Still a vegetable?" Nix screamed, stomping toward him.

Mulder scurried backwards like a crab, 'til he got the 60 or so feet to the bulkhead of the ever expanding boat. He looked around and was shocked that he couldn't even see the other side of the vessel anymore. It was too far away, swallowed up by the mist.

* What the fuck is going on here? * Mulder thought, tears springing to his eyes.

"Yeah, I'm still here." Nix's eyes blazed in anger. "Still a turnip, tube fed, mindless, because of you! Didn't they fucking teach you to shoot in the academy? Fucking hit me in the head and leave me brain dead, you bastard. You can't even shoot good enough to kill a man. Why didn't you kill me!!!??"

Nix charged Mulder at his last words and the panicked agent pushed himself up against the bulkhead and death by drowning than the slow torture Nix had planned for him.

"I'll get you, you fucking prick!"

Mulder heard the screams through the mist as he tried to put distance between himself and the boat.

"And if I get you here, you'll be stuck here forever...ever..evr!"

The words echoed eerily and Mulder shivered in the cold water. He'd stopped swimming for a moment, trying to get his bearings. The fog was so thick and the place so strange, that he had no idea which way to swim. He didn't even know if there was someplace to swim to. Was there any land here?

* Where ever here is. * Mulder thought with a laugh and promptly swallowed water, which started him choking.

* God my lungs feel tight, hope I don't get pneumonia.*

He could hear a low murmur, constant and soothing, almost sounding like voices and for lack of a better idea, he swam toward the sound. At least it was away from the boat. His strokes were long and sure and, amazingly, he felt like he would never tire. That he could swim like this forever. That thought gave him a chill. What was forever in this place? He almost screamed his thanks to a God he wasn't sure existed, when he finally saw the vague outline of a tree-lined bank. He trudged up to the grass and sand covered beach and collapsed. His lungs strained as he tried to rest and catch his breath.

Rolling over on his back, Mulder was surprised when he saw stars in the night sky. He raised his head to look around and the ever present mist was there, making the outer reaches of his vision a blurred, disappearing landscape. But overhead the the heavens were crystal clear. A familiar Milky Way of stars, the likes of which he hadn't

noticed since he was a child. It reminded him of when he and Sam would lie on the beach, on the island. Millions of twinkling orbs, clusters of stars...Mulder sat up quickly, forcing his wandering mind to return to the problem at hand. He took stock of himself and was pleased that other than the burning tightness in his chest, which was mercifully lessening, he was in pretty good condition. He didn't even feel tired. He patted down his person checking for other aches or pains. It hit him finally when he was once again patting down his chest. "Holy shit...", he muttered in amazement. His clothes, trench coat included, were completely dry.

"Damn it, what's going on!!!??" Mulder screamed out to the clear night sky.

"It's not nice to cuss, 'specially when there are children present," came a small voice out of the mist.

Mulder whirled to face the direction from which the comment came. His eyes grew wide at seeing a young girl walking toward him. Ever cautious, from experience with shape-shifting aliens, the agent backed away from the girl's approach, searching the beach for a stick or some other sort of weapon.

"Hi," the girl smiled. She was small, about the size of a 6 year old but Mulder could tell by her eyes that she was older. They were large and a warm, brownish green, much like his sister. He placed her about nine. Her hair was brown, but even in the dim light he could spot highlights of auburn. It was cut almost boyishly short. She wore jeans and a Lion King T-shirt. She studied his face and got suddenly serious upon noticing his obvious fear. "Hey, I'm not going to hurt you. My name's Amanda."

Mulder relaxed a bit and offered his hand. The girl walked up and shook hands like a pro.

"My name's Mulder."

"Mulder???!" her giggles belied her serious demeanor from the previous moment and Mulder felt the last of his tension ease. No shape-shifting alien could fake a nine year old girl's laugh. That's good. She was the real thing.

"Well, really it's Fox Mulder.."

"Fox Muddler..." the giggles grew louder and Fox found himself caught up in her infectious laughter. God, she reminded him of Sam, although he had never thought it funny when Sam and her friends had laughed at his name.

"Yeah," he smiled. "I think my parents hated me."

His comment caused the girl to grow serious once more.

"Do you know my mom?" the girl asked, her brow puckered. "The shiny ones said you're from my home town. Can you get me home to her?"

Mulder shook his head sadly, "I don't think so. Ahh, I don't even know where we are, so I don't know how to get home either."

"You know Nix is after you?" she asked, her face even more solemn at his answer.

"You know Nix?"

"Sure. Everybody here knows him, nobody likes him," she leaned forward to whisper her confession. "I don't like him either. He's extremely mean...you better watch out cause he likes to hurt people just out of meanness. He's been here even longer than me, way longer than me. Not too many people have been here as long as he has. And the ones that have are the crazy ones that hang out where we tell them the light is. They almost always can't see the light. I don't know why, but..."

Mulder listened quietly, trying to take in the girl's spewing fountain of information.

"What light?"

He had already persuaded himself that he was not dead, this place just couldn't be the afterlife, but this part about a light piqued his interest.

"Oh, the light," the little girl blanched at the word, her voice soft and quivery. "The light is death. My grandma is in the light. The shiny ones come from the light. But they're all dead over there. They can come out and visit here and at home. But they can't go back home, cause they're dead. I don't like the light. They call for me there. My grandma keeps telling me to come with her, but I need to get home. If I go with her, I can't go back home with my mom. See, my mom needs me."

Mulder continued to listen intently, gathering all the information he could from the little chatterbox.

"Can you take me to see the light?" He asked, feeling badly when Amanda's eyes grew wide with fear. He put a comforting hand on her shoulder and she smiled up at him, nodding

"Yeah, but I don't wanna get too close. A lot of the shiny people are here and if they'll talk to us, they'll explain more. They know everything, but they don't like telling us much. I don't think they're supposed to. I think it's a rule in heaven or something, not to tell us stuff." The child chattered on as they walked through the mist covered countryside.

Mulder listened as they strolled, trying to make sense of her tales and the odd landscape they passed through. It looked like 'home,' but then again, no one would ever see the variety of settings that passed before his eyes. It was all covered with a constant, thick, cloud of mist and the constant hum of voices was all around him, just like it was out in the water. It was like the fog that surrounded them was alive with sound. And now and then he would recognize one of the voices. Every now and then he would hear Scully; almost as if she were beside him, talking into his ear.

"Grandma tells me some things. But I still think she's keeping stuff from me. I could be paranoid."

Mulder chuckled at her and she glanced up at him, beaming with pride

at his amusement in her use of a fifty dollar word. He put a hand on her shoulder as they trekked.

* Here's a kid after my own heart *

"I keep telling her no, I can't go with her, 'cause I can hear Mama in the fog and I know she needs me to come home..."

"The voices are real?" Mulder asked, stopping short.

Amanda loved the fact that she had so attentive an audience and smiled up at him.

"Oh, yeah, they're the people we love back home talking to us. See, we can't talk back to them. Look, this is the just of the deal..."

"Gist," Mulder corrected.

"Whatever..." she said and continued, ignoring the agents chuckle. "The people in the light, the shiny people can go down to home. People down there can see and hear them, but they are dead. They got no bodies, that's why they're shiny; they can't live down there 'cause they got no bodies."

"We're souls, Fox," came another voice from the mist.

To give Mulder credit, he didn't start at this interruption. He was getting used to the strangeness of his situation. He did do a classic double take, though, when he saw from whom the voice came. It was his father's youngest brother, Uncle Angus.

* And people rag on me about my name. Angus Mulder. Geeze. No wonder I have such a sick sense of humor. It's hereditary. *

Mulder forced his mind back on course. Uncle Angus had been dead since '73. The same year Samantha went missing. He'd 'ate a bullet,' another Vietnam Vet who didn't make it all the way back from the war. Angus, an ex-Marine, reminded him a lot of Skinner, except he wasn't bald, wasn't an FBI agent...

"Fox, your mind is wandering...and you've only been here a few days. Most of you don't lose it for at least a year," Angus reprimanded, in his best 'Semper Fi' voice.

"I've been here for longer than that and I haven't lost it," Amanda piped in proudly.

"That's cause you're special, sweetheart," Angus smiled at the child.

Fox tried bravely to wrap his mind around the fact that he was standing in a mist covered netherworld, talking to his long dead uncle, who, apparently, could read his mind.

"Now that's the ticket, Fox!" Angus barked. "Yes, I can read your mind. Pretty light reading, I gotta say, soldier."

* Uncle Angus was always a tease. *

A strangled laugh escaped from Mulder's throat, as he felt his control slipping. His head popped back when Angus smacked him boldly across the face.

"Jesus Christ, Uncle Angus, why'd you do that?" he asked, reeling from the blow, his hand clasping his stinging cheek.

Mulder felt Amanda huddling behind him and heard her soft whimpers. He knelt before the child, embracing her and offering soothing, whispered murmurs of comfort.

"And look, you upset Amanda," Mulder said, eyes blazing.

Angus shrugged sheepishly. "Sorry, I was never very good around little girls. Remember how scared Sam always was of me?" The shimmering form of Mulder's uncle shrugged with a sigh. "But Shit! Fox, you need to get your act together! Right now!"

Mulder stood to face the 'man.'

* Holy cow I'm taller than Uncle Angus. Far out. *

Angus rolled his eyes. "My God, son, how did you ever make it through Oxford with an attention span as short as this. Get a grip, for God's sake or Nix'll get you for sure."

That did it for Mulder; his hold on his emotions broke and he began to laugh.

"I'm talking to my dead uncle, I'm in the Twilight Zone and a little girl is leading me to the light," he laughed, his knees beginning to shake. "What the fuck is going on!!"

"It's okay, Mulder," Amanda comforted. Her words, heard so often from another red head, were a lifeline. He grabbed it.

"I'm okay, honey." And he was, mostly. He turned to his uncle, his steel trap mind forming all the right questions to ask a visitor from the other side.

"Okay Angus...let me see if I have this right. You're a non corporeal entity from 'Heaven'...?"

"Yeah, close enough."

"Okay," the agent said, glad to finally be doing something he knew and was good at, grilling a suspect. "Then tell me, how are you in 'Heaven,' when you offed yourself? If I've got my Bible straight, don't suicides go to hell?"

"Yeah, you got your Bible straight," Uncle Angus said, in short clipped words, his voice smooth with sarcasm. "But who said what you read is gospel? Man wrote that book, so it's not infallible. We each get judged on our own merit by One being. And He knew why I did what I did and He was my judge. Not nobody down there, that's for damn sure."

Fox was silenced by his uncle's vehement reply.

Uncle Angus sighed again, his expression, once again, sheepishly

chagrined.

"I'm sorry." He spoke this time not at Mulder and Amanda, but to the clear sky. "Gotta work on this damn temper," he muttered to himself.

Taking a deep breath for control, Angus explained, "Look, some things I can tell you, some I can't. I'm a little sensitive about my death, 'cause it was so stupid. One of those, 'If I Knew Then,' kind of things. How about if I just jump to the chase and let you know what you need to do? There are..ah...certain rules about this kind of thing and I can't explain them to you. Just take my word for it. Some things won't be allowed 'cause they circumvent His ultimate plan..."

"HIS???" Mulder asked, and was stopped with a stern glance. The agent raised his hands in submission. "Okay, sorry."

With a smug look, Uncle Angus continued. "Okay. Number one. When you first came here you were in a coma, hanging between life and death." Angus paused to see how Mulder was taking this and he saw that his nephew had already figured as much. "Fox, does climbing through a window to get a psychic serial killer, who being psychic, knew you were coming, ring a bell?"

Mulder nodded in surprise, the memory returning. "Yeah, we made it in. The unsub must have been behind me when we started up the stairs. I didn't even know he was there until he opened fire. He hit me with at least three rounds...God, Scully! Is she okay?"

"Yeah, she's fine. She blew the guy away. She'd make a damn fine Marine. You got hit four times, point blank, with a Browning semi-automatic. Never trust a mad killer to obey gun laws. Anyway, it messed you up pretty bad, Mulder; you got one round in the head."

"Brain damage?" Mulder asked, feeling his stomach plummet.

"Well, there's swelling, but it's not in the cards yet...It's one of those variables that He hasn't quite decided. But the bad part is, you're here for a while, 'cause you're in a coma. They kept you under to help you to heal. Now here's the skinny. You've gotta avoid Nix 'til I can let you know whether to go back or to go into the light. You got that?"

"If I am brain damaged, can you come and bring me into the light? I don't wanna live like that, you know."

Uncle Angus cut a glance at Amanda. "Ah, Fox, that's another one of those variables. I've seen some of them go, but some, like Nix and...." His eyes went to Amanda once more, then he quickly looked away. "Well, sometimes there are people who won't LET their people go. But you don't have to worry about that part, huh? Scully knows your wishes."

Mulder looked at the little girl and the mystery that was the child came clear in his mind. She was a child who was stuck in a coma back in the 'Real' world, and her mother wouldn't let her go.

"You got it, Fox." Angus replied, confirming his suspicions. "She's

not being assisted right now, but her will to go home to her mother is so strong..."

Amanda looked up at the men, a petulant frown on her face, "Hey you guys talkin' about me?" she said angrily. Mulder put an arm around her in comfort.

"I'm sorry, Amanda," he murmured.

"It's okay, Mulder," she said, trying to smile, but what she could follow of the conversation between Mulder and his shiny person uncle upset her. A lot.

"Okay, I gotta hurry now, 'cause Nix is coming and you two gotta fly. Now, where was I...oh yeah, Nix. He's another one of those variables. Fox, if Nix gets to you, he's gonna try to kill you. Which isn't the same as killing you back on earth. See, if he kills you here you are brain dead, 'cause that's all you are when you're here. A mind. You will be stuck here for a long time. It'll seem like forever, 'cause this place is not for long term, it's a stopover kind of place and it kinda drives people crazy. See, when death happens here the body is undamaged, so you'll be in a vegetable kind of state. You won't be injured enough to pull the plug, 'cause you won't be on any kind of assistance. Your body will just go on breathing, but your mind will be stuck here. Till your body finally wears out. That's what you did to Nix. That's another reason why suicide isn't a good idea, 'cause if you don't do it right you can wind up here."

The burly Marine shuddered and Mulder did, too. This was not a place he wanted to spend any length of time. Except for meeting Amanda and getting to see Angus again, it had not been the highlight of his life...afterlife??...Whatever.

"But I have so many questions," Mulder pleaded, as his uncle moved to shake his hand.

Angus gave a half smile and pumped Mulder's hand. "Look, son, she'll show you the ropes, so you'll have a chance; and anything else, you don't really want to know, in case you do make it back. I've already told you too much as it is. Knowledge like this just doesn't work back home. People tend to crucify people who know too much, if you know what I mean. I just hope your brains got scrambled enough, so that if you go back, you won't remember this."

"Thanks a lot." Mulder chuckled wryly at his uncle's wish for him to have scrambled brains. "That's all I need."

Angus' frown was dark, "Now Fox, you got enough people on your ass down there for what you know about that world. Some truths you don't really want to find out." The man let go of his nephew's hand, squeezing it once to emphasize his words. "Now you two take off. He's coming."

Mulder took Amanda's hand and made to run off into the mist, but Angus' hand on his arm stopped him.

"Oh shit," Mulder's uncle swore, "I almost forgot. Listen quick. A word to the wise. Nix doesn't see the light. His time is a long way off. Now go."

Mulder ran blindly through the fog, Amanda in his arms. He felt like he could run forever, the tightness that had been in his chest, seemingly gone for good. Amanda held tight to his neck and the feel of her warm arms about him seemed to give him unlimited strength. He slowed finally at seeing a light ahead and stopped to put the child down.

"Amanda," he asked, turning the girl to see the brightness. "Is that the light?"

The child gulped audibly and nodded.

Mulder led her to a bench that had magically appeared and the two sat down to rest. She had been strangely silent since, even during, Uncle Angus' and his talk and it worried him.

"Well, 'Manda, what do you suggest we do now?"

Amanda smiled up at him. "My mamma calls me that. 'Manda without the A" Her eyes misted over and Mulder pulled her near, holding her close on his lap.

"Do you want me to die?" She sobbed, burying her wet face into his neck. "Is that what you and your uncle meant when you were talking? I didn't understand everything you were saying, but wasn't that the just???"

"Gist," Mulder corrected.

"Whatever," the child tried to laugh through her tears.

"You're something else, Buttmunch," he chuckled, giving her a squeeze, before setting her beside him.

Amanda giggled at his pet name and Mulder felt tears spring to his eyes.

"Don't cry...I'm here."

Scully's voice floated through the mist. Amanda looked up at him as she heard the woman's words.

"The lady who loves you...is she your wife?"

"No, she's my partner," Mulder answered out of reflex, fighting the tears of longing. He wiped a hand across his eyes and knew Amanda was trying to understand. "I work with her."

"She's always there...she must be your lover, too."

Mulder couldn't stop the whoop of laughter that slipped from him at the precocious child's statement. He cast a sidelong glance at her and saw she was beaming because she had shocked him.

"I wish," he muttered and Amanda burst into giggles at his risque utterance. Mulder winked at her and she leaned her head against him, pulling her feet up on the bench to get comfortable.

"You gonna marry her?"

Mulder stopped a moment to think before he answered. "Maybe, if I get back. Yeah, maybe I will."

This pleased the girl and she snuggled closer. "Yeah, then you can have a little girl and name her Amanda and I can come over and baby-sit..."

Mulder let the child ramble on, allowing her to share her dreams as he rested in the quiet, still night.

Part 2 - "Who Ya Gonna Call..."

Daylight never came. Amanda and Mulder never slept. They sat for hours, days...who knew how long, on the bench. Physical fatigue might not have been a problem in this place, but mental strain was. The little girl spent the time talking about this, and that. It was an endless prattle that the man found both amusing and oddly relaxing. All the child needed from him was an occasional word or two to reassure her that he was listening. Even though some of what she told him just kind of floated right through his weary brain, a good bit of what she said was very informative.

She had been here for what she figured to be three years. Her deductive reasoning on this was simple, each year her mother spent Amanda's birthday at her bedside. She guessed she had been placed in some kind of hospital/rest home, because sometimes she had nurses talking to her. Mulder felt she was probably right, because a trained and caring nurse would know that even someone in a vegetative state needed stimuli. Mulder had blanched a bit when she mentioned a Nurse Nancy, but he smiled a wry smile at the coincidence. This world did resemble his time spent in that world of virtual reality, with one great and lucky exception. He discovered that for a good part, he, was the programmer for his environment in this world.

Well, maybe not completely, for Uncle Angus had assured him there was a Master Programmer, but, he could control some things that were around him. He discovered the bench they sat on right that very minute had sprang from Amanda's mind. And the crazy expanding boat must have come from Nix's imagination and at his wishes. Amanda suggested that the beach he had landed on, had come from his own subconscious. Had he really not wanted to get out of the water and put his feet on solid ground, he would have been swimming around that lake even now. A chilling thought, in more ways than one.

After hearing from Amanda all the ways he could manipulate things, here he decided to try a little experiment. He wished for some fresh clothes and sure enough, in that moment, he was attired in a clean, pressed suit.

"Man this is great" Mulder exclaimed excitedly. He rose from the bench and paraded in front of the girl his handiwork.

The little girl's smile reminded him of one that Scaly often gave him.

Are women born knowing how to give men that smile

A chuckle escaped at the thought. That grin could only be described as a 'Fondly Patronizing' look.

He felt a heaviness against his chest and was surprised to find not only his gun, but wonder of wonders, his cell phone.

"Hey look, 'Manda. I'm fully equipped."

Amanda glanced at the phone and shook her head grinning. "Who ya gonna call...Ghostbusters??" she said smugly, then giggled when he cast her the evil eye.

"Think the gun'll work?" Mulder quizzed his fountain of knowledge.

Amanda pondered the question a moment, then shrugged. "Try it out."

"On what?"

Mulder's inspiration came in the form of a regulation silhouette, hung on a tree. Taking aim, he fired. Dead on through the heart. Even his aim was better here. The gun worked. Then it hit him that the fact fire arms worked here was a two edged sword. If Uncle Angus was right, and the spirit's sources were, after all, pretty unimpeachable, he couldn't kill Nix. The man was already brain dead from the first time he'd shot him. He could slow him down with pain. That much was true. The people stuck here could definitely feel pain, as Nix's blow to his solar plexus and Angus slap had shown him. But, Mulder knew that he was just in a coma, and still had brain function. So Nix could conjure a gun and kill him. Angus had said that was the crazy man's plan.

In the next moment, Mulder discovered firing the gun had been a mistake. A big mistake. Nix not only conjured a gun, he'd conjured a machine gun. The mist around Mulder and Amanda exploded with sound and flying bullets. Mulder grabbed the child and pulled her to the ground.

"Muldeer!!"

Amanda lay at his side, whimpering softly. When Nix screamed, she shivered uncontrollably against him.

'Amanda," he whispered into her ear. The girl was unresponsive. It scared the agent. "Amanda, are you okay?" Fox was frantic.

"Yes," she peeped.

"Were you hit?"

"No."

Mulder pondered the predicament, all the while hearing the child's quick frantic breathing on his face. He searched through the mist trying to spot a hiding place. Then it hit him. The light...Nix couldn't see the light. Maybe if they got as close to it as they could, without actually going in, he couldn't see them. It might at least offer them some protection. And if worse came to worse, they could go into it. To Mulder that was a viable option, better than years stuck in this place. Amanda on the other hand, well it was going to be hard enough to get her to go even close to that beacon.

"Come on honey," he whispered to her, "I got an idea."

Amanda followed him with complete trust, and hunkering down, they scurried off. Everything was going fine until the child saw where they were heading. She froze.

"NO!!!" a careening scream issued from the little girl. A sound louder than Mulder thought was possible from so small a body. The caterwauling echo'd loudly through the fog.

Mulder pulled her to the ground as bullets split the air where they had been standing, The agent put a hand over her mouth and pleaded frantically in her ear.

"Amanda, No. Shhhh!!!" His words came in a heated rush. "That's how he finds us. Honey, he can't see us till he's right on us. Not through the mist. But he can hear us if we're loud. This mist is a conductor. That means its like a telephone wire. It's why we can here the voices from back home. When I fired the gun, that's how he found us."

She continued to squirm against him, but he felt her screams still. Cautiously, he removed his hand. It pained him to hear her frightened, panting sobs.

"You wanna pull me into the light, Fox," she whimpered softly

"Oh no honey" Mulder choked out, almost sobbing himself. He wrapped his arms about her, smoothing her soft, short hair, "I'd never do that to you. I love you, buttmunch. You only go into that light when you want to go, baby. I'd never make you do it."

Mulder saw her tear filled eyes sparkling in the starlight, and his own filled and spilled over.

"Let's see if he can see us by the light" Amanda whispered in his ear, nudging him to get up.

Mulder patted her shoulder in encouragement and the two, holding hands crept toward the bright glow.

Nix could hear their whispers and snuck toward the two. A machine gun was fine, but what he really wanted to see was the expression on Fox Mulder's face when he put a bullet through his brain. He cursed when the agent and girl got up and snuck off. They were quiet, but he had never seen the mist swallow anyone as quickly as it did his prey. They completely disappeared. He ran to the spot where they had vanished in the mist. The fog at this point was so thick, light didn't even reflect off of it. Nix felt a vague chill and moved away, deciding to search elsewhere for the pair.

Mulder didn't like how close a call they had. He and Amanda spent the next few days/weeks questioning any souls they spotted for information and honing their skills at environmental manipulation. They had a couple of more run ins with Nix, but he never got as close to them during this time as he had that time, by the bench.

Boredom was a problem though, as they had no references to mark the time. Mulder was dismayed that he didn't hear Scully as often and

Amanda, unintentionally made him feel worse, when she told him that her Mom's visits had got further apart the longer she was her coma.

"How long do you think I've been here?" Mulder whispered. They both always whispered now. No sense in tipping Nix off to there whereabouts.

"Well, I haven't had another birthday," Amanda piped.

Her words didn't help how Mulder felt. He was beginning to worry about what was going on back home.

*Am I brain damaged? How long is my coma gonna last? Am I a vegetable? Is that why Scully's not visiting me? *

They hadn't spotted Uncle Angus since his one visit and Amanda was right. The 'shiny people' didn't give out much information. Mulder was growing bitter. God was entirely too tight lipped.

He almost gave up hope and was pondering going into the light. The one thing that kept him from doing this was he didn't want to leave Amanda alone. He could not make the little girl understand that he felt that death was better than here. The child's hope could not be shaken. She would not enter the light as long as her Momma needed her.

Until the time Uncle Angus finally came back.

They stayed close to the light for protection and spent lots of time questioning the beings that came and went through the portal. At last Fox saw his eccentric Uncle.

"Yo Marine!" He called

Angus smiled at his greeting, but Mulder could tell he had something important to say. The agent's stomach sank, because judging by his Uncle's expression, the news was not good.

* I'm brain damaged*

"No Fox," Angus said, shaking his head, "It looks like you'll either recover fully or die"

"Oh, good " Mulder replied sarcastically "Ahh...I pick recover fully."

Angus chuckled, "Spoken like a true smart ass," he said fondly. " No. that won't be decided till you get back, but there's a problem. See they got you in an induced coma ...It's helping you to recover, but you gotta get home now. Nix has figured out how you been hiding from him. He's out there right now, just waiting for the perfect moment. If you move away from right here, in front of the door, he'll get you. Or her."

Mulder scowled, " That's perfect...just perfect. What do you suggest?" his tone was bitter. Life here was bad enough, but to be confined to the portal, well, he'd rather go into the light.

"Well, somebody has to tell your friend Scully to get the Doctor's to

allow you to wake up. He knows you've healed enough. They're worried about the pain you'll have but, hell, you know you don't have a choice."

"Will you do that for me?" Mulder asked his Uncle. "Appear to Scully and tell her what we need. She's a skeptic, but you look enough like me that she's bound to see the resemblance. That'll help convince her."

"I'm a lot better looking" Angus said with a wry grin. His face grew serious with what he had to say. "But He won't let me do it There's only one person He'll let do it."

Mulder followed his Uncles gaze to Amanda and felt his blood chill at seeing her eyes go wild.

"No!" He spat.

"He say's she has a chance at coming back here, but she'll have to pay a price. The trip will most likely leave her brain dead"

"No way!" Mulder replied, squatting down to comfort the girl. " Plan B."

Uncle Angus shook his head, "There isn't any Plan B"

"Well, I'll just go back with you, into the light." Mulder replied angrily.

At that moment, the light turned off and Mulder was shocked to see Amanda and Angus blink off. They disappeared in an instant.

"AMANDA!!" the agent yelled.

At his scream, a bullet whizzed by his head.

"Shit" Nix cursed at the near miss.

Mulder dropped to the ground. He couldn't see the light. He was alone out here with Nix and his only escape route was cut off. He huddled in the darkness, allowing the fog to protectively swallow him. He knew that the Master Programmer was in charge. And there was nothing he could do.

Amanda saw Fox drop to the ground and heard the bullet whiz by. She looked up Angus with tears in her eyes and took courage from his smile, so like her friends.

"You know what you have to do sweetheart" Angus murmured softly

The little girl nodded, but stalled, tears streaming down her face.

"But what about my Mama?"

"HE'LL help her understand"

Amanda gave a nod, and with a child's faith, stepped in to the light.

Dana Scully sat in the hall outside of the ICU. She couldn't count how many times she'd made this vigil. Her hands shook as she brought the cup to her lips and she fought the tears. Her partner had been critically injured in a stake out, a month to the day before. At first there had been no hope. A bullet lodged in his brain. One more had had torn through his chest, collapsing his lung, almost drowning him in his own blood. Another had ripped open his gut, coming to rest just inches from his spine. And the fourth had hit his knee, shattering it.

She'd spent many an hour in the hospital chapel. Praying. Thinking. And somebody had listened. At first. Mulder had started gaining ground. It looked like he was going to recover. The Doctors had suggested induced coma and Dana, knowing how Mulder fought almost everything that was good for him, had agreed. And the healing respite had worked. Mulder's recovery was progressing rapidly. Yesterday had been a crossroads. They had to decide whether to allow the coma to continue or to bring him out. Dana and the Doctors chose to keep Mulder sedated. The very fighting will that had allowed him to survive so grave an injury would still be working against him. He needed to rest and recover. Plus the pain would still be severe.

And then everything went to hell. Not more than an hour ago, Dana received a call that Mulder's vitals were much too rapid and erratic. She had hurried to the hospital to find her partner was in danger of stroke. They could do nothing to control his skyrocketing blood pressure and racing pulse. He was going to burn out at this rate.

Scully sighed. She felt so tired. She sat listlessly, resting, her eyes closing of their own will. She felt she must have dosed, because she didn't here anyone approach. The slight touch on her arm brought her instantly awake and she was surprised to see a solemn little girl standing in front of her. The child looked to be a small-for-her-age eight or nine. Her reddish - brown hair was close cropped in a style Dana herself had worn on in off during her childhood. Pixie, it had been called a Pixie haircut. She wore a clean but old Lion King T-shirt and faded but clean jeans. And tense runners, as her Navy dad used to call them.

The girl grinned at her and Scully returned her smile.

"Are you lost honey?" Dana asked as she straightened, running a hand through her sleep mussed hair.

The child gave a solemn nod. She seemed to be pondering something, mulling it over in her head.

"Scully, Mulder and Uncle Angus sent me to tell you what you need to do"

Her words shocked the agent and made her shiver. What was going on?

Am I dreaming

"No," the child replied and a giggle escaped her, "Oh cool, I read your mind, like Uncle Angus."

What is going on here

"Look, I gotta hurry back Scully" The child said urgently. "You gotta tell the Doctors to let Mulder come out of the coma or he'll never make it back, okay"

Dana nodded and the little girl grinned.

"Good," she laughed and started off down the hall, only to turn at the end. "Oh, Mulder promised you'd name your first kid Amanda," and with a wave she was gone.

Scully sat in stunned silence trying to take her hallucination in. She almost had herself convinced it was stress, when her thoughts were interrupted by the sound of crying.

Dana looked up and saw a young woman about her age, exiting the double doors of the ICU. The woman nodded at the agent and offered a weak grin. Dana was taken aback by the startling resemblance of this grieving woman and the child in her dream.

"Hi," the woman said softly, a bit uncomfortable with Scully's stare.

"Hi" Dana answered, embarrassed by her own rudeness. The agent busied herself with looking for a brush in her purse, not wanting to meet the woman's eyes.

Apparently the fellow ICU visitor needed to talk, for she started up a conversation "They just brought my daughter up" the young mother said, and continued when Scully nodded in sympathy. " She's nine. She's been in a coma for three years, but about an hour ago, she just..." she stopped, unable to continue through the tears.

Scully reached out a wildly shaking hand to comfort the young mother and forced herself to ask the question.

"Wha...What's your daughter's name?"

"Amanda."

Scully bolted to her feet and with a hurried 'Excuse Me,' ran down the hall on a mission, leaving the woman to stare after her in stunned silence.

Mulder kept to the ground, trying to stay just beyond the reaches of Nix's vision. The cat and mouse game seemed to go on for hours and his mind was growing so weary. His heart was racing in his chest, pounding so loud it was hard to believe Nix couldn't hear it. Suddenly the door way opened, just as quickly as it had closed and the light burned brightly once again. Fox welcomed the light and stood to follow Amanda into it. He stopped short when he heard the child scream.

"No! Mulder wait!" she came rushing from the portal into his arms.

He scooped her up and hugged her close, laughing and crying all at once as the little girl babbled excitedly.

"I did it Mulder. I told her what to do. Boy is she pretty. I told her to name your baby Amanda" the child rattled on excitedly.

"Good for you buttmunch" he cried, holding Amanda tight. His heart stopped in his chest when he spotted Nix.

The man was standing not more than five feet away, straining to see through the fog. Aiming a gun directly at them. Mulder sat Amanda down and gave her a shove. "Run Amanda"

That was all Nix needed to take a bead on the agent and he fired instantly at Mulder's head.

Fox Mulder came awake to searing pain, in his chest, in his gut, in his head. He felt he was choking and struggled against the tube in his throat.

"Relax Mulder." came Dana Scully's soothing voice, her warm, gentle hands caressing his forehead "Relax"

Mulder felt tears spring to his eyes now that he was at last able to see her.

Dana saw the tears and leaned closer to him to comfort, "I know it hurts but just relax and let us help you"

His partner was amazed when he nodded and did exactly what she said. Fox Mulder relaxed, peacefully drifting off to sleep, thankful to be home again.

Part 3 - "...and a child shall lead them."

Two months had passed and Fox Mulder had recovered enough to be going home, albeit it was his partners home he was going to. He had been six weeks in this room and was sick at the sight of the four wall that surrounded him. However, this time, to Dana Scullys amazement, he had not complained once. He had done everything the Doctors told him to do. No griping, no whining.

"We should put you in a coma everytime you get hurt," Scully teased.

She felt badly when she saw the frightened look on his face.

"Sorry," she murmured, patting his leg in comfort.

He nodded in acceptance of her apology and gave her a grin to reassure her he was okay.

He had been so good this hospital stay it scared her. He seemed to be back to normal, but something had happened to him. She didn't think it was any kind of brain damage. The bullet hadn't hit any of the centers of the brain where personality lay. Maybe it was just the fact he'd faced his own mortality. She wondered if he'd had a near death experience. She knew her own had changed her. She had come back to the church after her cancer.

That must be it she thought to her self.

One of the changes she noticed was nothing seemed to surprise him. She had told him the story of her vision of the little girl and how the child had saved his life and he didn't even tease her about her lack of skepticism. He was very emotional, which Dana knew was common after injury to the brain. He cried for hours when she relayed the fact the little girl had died almost the same time he regained consciousness. She wanted to discuss all the strange coincidence that had occurred. First there was the fact that her vision had told her to name their child Amanda.

Like we'd have ever a kid together. Oh brother!

That had been her name, the child who had died. Amanda. Two, she'd seen the little girl after her death. It was the girl in her vision. Lastly, the child had told her about an Uncle Angus.

God, where did the Mulder family get those names?

Scully had learned during her friendship to Mulder that he had an Uncle who had killed himself years before, but to learn from a vision his name was Angus...well, that was a bit too much for coincidence.

Oddly, Mulder had not even wanted to discuss it with her. No debates, no suppositions, no haranguing her with his own beliefs on what the after life was like. He had simply stated, " I don't think we're really meant to know what comes next" and refused to be baited into any kind of discussion. Mulder not wanting to argue with her really had her worried.

But he was ready to come home today. And he was coming home with her.

They were only a block from the hospital when Mulder handed Scully the slip of paper. She glanced at it and her brow raised questioningly. It was an address.

"It's where they buried Amanda" Mulder told her, and he gave her a pleading look. "Can we stop there. It's on the way."

Scully felt she had to comply with his wishes, there were tears in his eyes. Another shock came when she got to the grave site. There were several people there including the little girl's Mother. The young woman rushed to the car when she saw it was Mulder and helped Scully get him into his wheelchair.

"It's here" she exclaimed excitedly, leading the way up the walk to the graveside. " Thank you for buying it for her. I could never have gotten it so quickly. what with the expenses and all"

Scully leaned over the chair to whisper in his ear "You bought her a marker"

Mulder nodded, but stayed silent. They couldn't get his chair next to the stone, so Amanda's mother read the inscription Mulder had supplied --

AMANDA RAE MCKINNON

"Beloved"

August 9, 1989 - March 1, 1999

"...and a child shall lead them"

the end

End
file.